



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 105th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 144

WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 1998

No. 16

Senate

S1052

THE UNITED NATIONS-IRAQ AGREEMENT

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, I listened with great interest yesterday to the comments of the majority leader on the agreement between the United Nations and Iraq. I did so particularly since I had come to the floor in the past and publicly credited him and complimented him for his forceful assertion the night of the State of the Union indicating we would stand united, Democrats and Republicans, in our opposition to Saddam Hussein. That was badly needed at the time. It was a statesmanlike thing to do, and it was applauded by all of us.

But I must admit I was perplexed yesterday by the majority leader's comments. He seemed, in my view, Mr. President, to rush to judgment to engage in a pessimistic fatalism that I think permeated his remarks and I think are unwarranted.

The majority leader is correct, based on what I heard yesterday, at least in one important respect, and that is the agreement between the United Nations and Iraq should be judged by whether it furthers American interests from our perspective. This is entirely consistent with the position taken by President Clinton. He and his national security team are in the process of making that judgment, which is: Is this agreement consistent with and does it further U.S. interests?

The administration is seeking clarifications to the ambiguities in this very general agreement. It is using our formidable diplomatic muscle, Mr. President, to settle unanswered questions in our favor, as I speak.

In contrast to the gloomy assessment presented by the Senate majority leader, things appear to be breaking our way so far, as we seek the proper interpretation of that agreement.

Secretary General Kofi Annan has provided assurances on some of the key questions that have arisen in the accord.

First, the new special team will be an integral part of UNSCOM and not a separate entity, as some worry.

Second, the diplomats to be appointed to the new team will act as observers only. UNSCOM will retain operational control of the entire inspection process.

Third, the head of the new special team within UNSCOM for inspecting Presidential sites will be an arms control expert with a solid track record in arms control. Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala, the current Undersecretary General for disarmament, who has recently completed a tour as Sri Lanka's ambassador to the United States, will be that person. He has played a key role in making the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty permanent. He and Ambassador Richard Butler have known each other for nearly 20 years, and they appear to be able to work together and respect one another.

Fourth, UNSCOM and the Secretary General, not Iraq, will develop the procedures for inspecting the Presidential sites.

Fifth, UNSCOM and Chairman Butler will retain their independence.

Sixth, the reporting lines remain intact. The new team leader will report to Ambassador Butler, who, in turn, reports to the Security Council through the Secretary General, as UNSCOM's chairman has done since 1991.

Finally, the new representative of the Secretary General in Baghdad will not have a direct role in the UNSCOM inspections process.

If these assurances pan out, then this agreement will go a long way toward furthering the United States national interests.

I have personally known the Secretary General, Kofi Annan, for many years, and I regard him as a man of his word. So I have no reason to doubt these assurances that have been made now on the record.

For the sake of argument, let us assume that the Secretary General is attempting to deceive us, which I know he is not. In that case, I don't see that we have given up any of our options,

even if that were his intention.

We are not bound by this agreement. If it provides unworkable mechanisms to let UNSCOM do its job, or if it undermines the integrity of UNSCOM, we can and should walk away from it.

The critics would have us believe that we are the 'helpless superpower,' that we are bound by the terms of an agreement negotiated by an omnipotent United Nations. This simply does not conform with reality or square with the facts.

We have a formidable armada assembled in the Persian Gulf poised to strike at a moment's notice. That armada can be called into service if the agreement falls short or if Saddam Hussein reneges on his commitments. The agreement does not in any way suspend our right to act unilaterally or multilaterally for that matter.

Indeed, should the agreement be violated, the use of force would meet with, in my view, much less international opposition than it would have in the absence of an agreement.

An allegation that I find particularly puzzling is that we have 'subcontracted our foreign policy' to the United Nations. Granted, it makes for a crisp sound bite that everybody will pick up, but like most sound bites, it lacks substance.

Those who make this politically motivated charge seem to ignore that the Secretary General is acting according to specific guidelines issued by the Security Council. They seem to forget that the United States is in the Security Council and our Secretary of State, in particular, played a central role in preparing these guidelines.

Would the critics have preferred the Russians and the French coming up with an agreement without our input, or the Secretary General acting on the basis of his own instincts? Or would they rather have him act on the basis of the red lines that we drew in the agreement as a member of the Security Council? Or to avoid subcontracting our foreign policy, would the critics have preferred our diplomats traveling to Baghdad?

The charge also misses the fact that we have maintained support for our policy by acting within the bounds of the U.N. resolutions, which we crafted. We have not subcontracted; we have set the terms for Iraqi compliance.

Throughout this crisis, the same critics have leveled exaggerated charges that we have precious little international support for our policy; yet, in the same breath they call for a course of action, such as toppling the regime, that would guarantee absolutely no international support and without the willingness to supply our military with the force necessary to do that. It seems to me that this is a glaring contradiction in arguments made by the critics of President Clinton's approach. You can't have it both ways.

I believe that the Presidents resolve in backing

diplomacy with force has been vindicated. It has not been easy. He was subjected to criticism from those who wanted to go farther and those who wished he hadn't gone as far as he did. These critics make some valid arguments, but they fail to put any realistic alternatives forward. They also fail to recognize that their suggested course would entail far greater costs than the President's approach.

In their rush to criticize the Clinton administration, the critics have gotten lost in the proverbial weeds. They have conjured up worst-case scenarios and portrayed American options as being much more limited than they actually are.

As the facts come in, the false picture they have

painted is gradually being chipped away. The agreement moves us to a far more advantageous position than we were in before the crisis began. If Iraq implements the agreement, we will have access to all suspect weapons sites in Iraq for the first time. If Iraq refuses to comply this time around, then we will be in a much stronger position to justify our use of force, which I am convinced we will exercise.

The bottom line, Mr. President, is that we have given up none of our options, while the agreement has very likely narrowed the options for Saddam Hussein.